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summer salads

Celebrate the flavors of the season.

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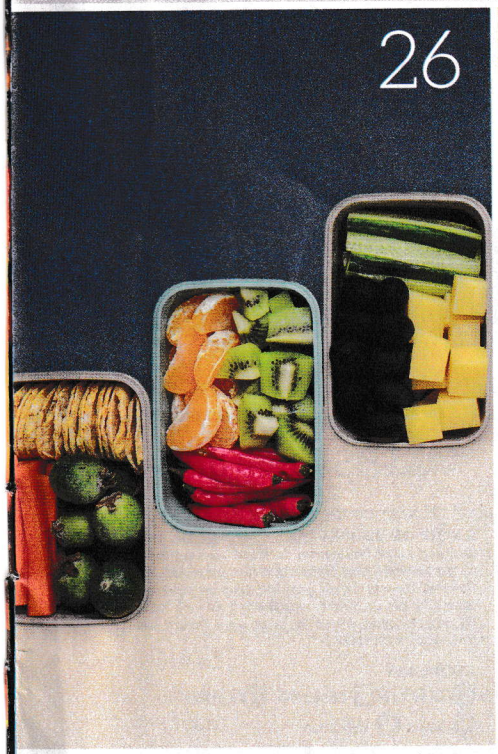

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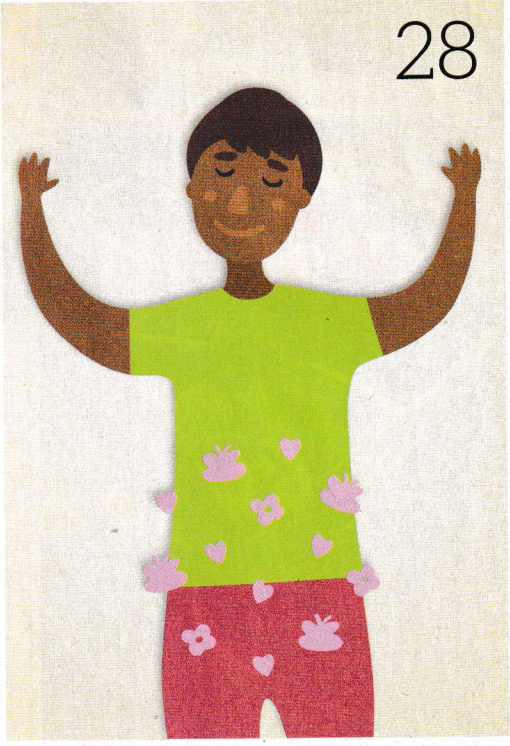

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A NOTE ON RECIPES
Nutritional analysis from Edamam. Nutritional values vary depending on portion size, freshness of ingredients, storage, and cooking techniques. They should be used only as a guide. Star ratings are based on standard values (SVs) that are currently recommended: ★★★★★ Extraordinary (50 percent or better), ★★★★ Top source, ★★★ Excellent source, ★★ Good source, ★ Fair source

RECIPE KEY
D Dairy Free · G Gluten Free · N Nut Free · V Vegan · V Vegetarian

25 min prep time
serves **4**

Stone Fruit Salad with Tomatoes and Mozzarella G N V

From ***Peckish*** by Suzanne Lenzer ($32.50, Rodale Books, 2025)

- 2 peaches or nectarines, pitted and cut into ½-inch pieces
- 2 c cherry tomatoes (yellow and red), halved
- ½ small red onion, thinly sliced into half-moons
- 3 oz fresh mozzarella, torn into bite-size pieces
- 2-3 Tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
- Juice of 1 lemon
- 2 c halved, pitted cherries
- 3-4 stems basil, leaves picked for garnish
- Flaky sea salt

1. In a large bowl, combine peaches, tomatoes, onion, and mozzarella.

2. Drizzle everything lightly with oil and lemon juice. Toss mixture to combine. Add cherries and toss again very gently. (If you're too aggressive here, the entire salad will turn purple with cherry juice. You want the different colors to show as well as the vibrant flavors.)

3. Transfer salad to a large platter. Add a generous amount of basil leaves. Sprinkle with salt and serve.

Per serving (made with peaches): 230 Calories, 8 g Protein, 17 mg Cholesterol, 27 g Carbohydrates, 20 g Total sugars (0 g Added sugars), 5 g Fiber, 12 g Total fat (4 g sat), 400 mg Sodium, ★★★ Vitamin C, ★★ Vitamin B12, ★ Vitamin A, B2 (riboflavin), B6, E, K, Calcium, Phosphorus, Potassium

age better with these foods

High intakes of certain foods appear to promote healthier aging. Black tea, berries, citrus fruits, and apples are among the leaders, according to a new study. All are rich in flavonoids.

"We know from previous research that people who have a higher flavonoid intake tend to live longer, and they are also less likely to get any of the major chronic diseases such as dementia, diabetes, or heart disease," said researcher Nicola Bondonno, PhD. "Our research shows that people who consume more flavonoids tend to age better."

The study team noted that flavonoids help lower risks of unhealthy aging, including frailty, impaired physical function, and poor mental health.

SELECTED SOURCES **"Associations between flavonoid-rich food and flavonoid intakes and incident unhealthy aging outcomes in older United States males and females"** by N.P. Bondonno et al., *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition,* 5/25 • **"Black tea and berries could contribute to healthier aging,"** Edith Cowan University, 5/5/25

salubrious sauerkraut

"A little bit of sauerkraut could go a long way," says nutritionist Maria Marco, PhD. "We should be thinking about including these fermented foods in our regular diets and not just as a side on our hot dogs."

Dr. Marco compared the effects of sauerkraut and raw cabbage on intestinal health. She determined that fermentation changes cabbage's nutritional profile, increasing its beneficial components, such as amino acids, that are linked to gut health.

SELECTED SOURCES **"The fermented cabbage metabolome and its protection against cytokine-induced intestinal barrier disruption of Caco-2 monolayers"** by L. Wei and M.L. Marco, *Applied and Environmental Microbiology,* 4/7/25 • **"The gut health benefits of sauerkraut,"** University of California—Davis, 4/14/25

a splash of **flavor**

What household item is strong enough to clean up grease and grime, but gentle enough for humans to consume? Vinegar! There are many types of vinegar, and each has its own uses. Here are a few to consider.

Apple cider vinegar (ACV), as its name suggests, is made from apples and has strong antimicrobial properties. ACV also has a cooling and toning effect on eczema and may ease acid reflux and heartburn. It works best diluted in water or green tea. Although it has lower acidity than other types of vinegar, it should not be used on open cuts (it will burn).

Balsamic vinegar is made from fermented whole pressed grapes. The acetic acid in balsamic vinegar may help improve digestion, and it may also help to control blood sugar spikes. It has a unique sweet taste that sets it apart from other vinegars and is commonly used in salad dressings and marinades. Some people enjoy it drizzled on fruit.

Rice vinegar is frequently found in Asian dishes like stir-fries and sushi. It's also great for pickling vegetables. Emerging research suggests that rice vinegar may help lower cholesterol and triglyceride levels and reduce the risk of developing heart disease and other cardiovascular issues.

White distilled vinegar is derived from distilled alcohol (commonly made from grains). In contrast to other types of vinegar, white distilled vinegar does not have a strong flavor profile, but it is highly acidic, making it a great choice for pickling fresh produce. Many people also use it as a natural cleaning solution.

Wine vinegar is made from red or white wine, giving it a sharp flavor. Wine vinegar is commonly used in marinades for meat and fish, as well as salad dressings. Like other types of vinegar, wine vinegar may have beneficial effects on blood sugar and heart health.

SELECTED SOURCES **"Health benefits of balsamic vinegar,"** 12/30/24; **"Red wine vinegar: Are there health benefits?"** 12/22/24; **"Rice vinegar: Is it good for you?"** 12/24/24, www.WebMD.com • **"Vinegar,"** The Nutrition Source, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, https://nutritionsource.hsph.harvard.edu, 2025

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BY EVA MILOTTE

summer salads

go beyond leafy greens

These healthy recipes add in a mix of interesting and fresh ingredients that make them much more than just typical green salads.

Chopped Mexican Salad G N V

From the *Taste for Life* test kitchen

25 min prep time
serves 4

Lime Dressing

- ½ c lime juice
- ¼ c extra-virgin olive oil
- ½ tsp ground cumin
- ¼ tsp hot pepper flakes
- 1 Tbsp honey
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper

Salad

- 4 c chopped romaine lettuce
- 2 c peeled and chopped jicama
- 2 c fresh or frozen (defrosted) corn
- 1 (14 oz) can black beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 red bell pepper, chopped
- ½ c chopped cilantro
- 3 avocados, peeled and diced
- 1 c crumbled cotija cheese*

1. In a small bowl, whisk together lime juice, oil, cumin, hot pepper flakes, and honey. Season with salt and pepper to taste.
2. In a large bowl, gently toss lettuce, jicama, corn, beans, bell pepper, cilantro, and avocado together.
3. Transfer salad to serving plates. Drizzle with dressing and garnish with cheese.

*If you can't find cotija cheese, substitute feta cheese or goat cheese.

Per serving (made with cotija cheese): 729 Calories, 22 g Protein, 30 mg Cholesterol, 67 g Carbohydrates, 14 g Total sugars (4 g Added sugars), 25 g Fiber, 47 g Total fat (11 g sat), 743 mg Sodium, ★★★★★ Vitamin B6, C, K, Folate, Phosphorus, ★★★★ Vitamin B1 (thiamine), B2 (riboflavin), E, Magnesium, ★★★ Vitamin A, B3 (niacin), Calcium, Potassium, Zinc, ★★ Vitamin B12, Iron

Grilled Corn and Zucchini Salad GNV

Adapted from ***BISMILLAH, LET'S EAT: Fresh and Vibrant Recipes from My Family to Yours,*** published on October 1, 2024. Copyright © 2024 by Zehra Allibhai. Used by arrangement with Grand Central Publishing, a division of Hachette Book Group. All rights reserved.

- 2-3 Tbsp olive oil, divided
- 3 medium zucchini, thickly sliced
- 2 c corn kernels (fresh, canned, or thawed from frozen)
- 1 c crumbled feta cheese
- 2 c arugula
- Juice of ½ lemon
- Salt and pepper to taste

1. Heat a grill pan or frying pan over medium-high heat.

2. Drizzle 1½ tablespoons of the oil over the zucchini. Place zucchini on hot pan and cook until they begin to brown and char on the bottom, for 4 to 5 minutes. Flip and repeat on other side. Remove zucchini from pan and set aside.

3. Add corn to hot pan and cook until golden brown, for 3 to 4 minutes.

4. Place zucchini, corn, feta, and arugula in a large bowl and toss together. Drizzle remaining oil (about 1 tablespoon) and lemon juice over salad. Season to taste with salt and pepper. This salad will keep in the fridge for 1 or 2 days.

Kitchen Note: You could make this salad anytime, but it's particularly great at the height of summer when zucchini and corn are in season.

Per serving: 252 Calories, 10 g Protein, 33 mg Cholesterol, 21 g Carbohydrates, 9 g Total sugars (0 g Added sugars), 3 g Fiber, 16 g Total fat (6 g sat), 661 mg Sodium, ★★★★ Vitamin C, ★★★ Vitamin B2 (riboflavin), B6, Phosphorus, ★★ Vitamin B1 (thiamine), B12, Calcium, Folate, ★ Vitamin B3 (niacin), K, Magnesium, Potassium, Zinc

30 min prep time
serves 4

continued from page 13

Sesame, Ginger and Mint Noodle Salad DNV

From ***Make It Vegan*** by Madeleine Olivia ($35, Quadrille, 2024)

20 min prep time

serves **2**

5½–7 oz soba or udon noodles
¼ red cabbage
1 carrot
1 cucumber
2 spring onions (scallions), sliced
Sprig of mint, chopped
Handful of cilantro, chopped
2 Tbsp sesame seeds

For the Dressing

3 Tbsp hulled tahini*
2 Tbsp water
1 Tbsp soy sauce (or tamari for a gluten-free option)
1 tsp maple syrup
2 tsp toasted sesame oil
Thumb-size piece (about 2 inches) fresh ginger root, finely chopped or minced
1 garlic clove, finely chopped
Grated zest and juice of 1 lime
Pinch hot pepper flakes

1. Cook noodles in a large saucepan of boiling water for 8 to 10 minutes. Drain and rinse under cold running water. Set aside.

2. Meanwhile, thinly slice cabbage and create ribbons with carrot and cucumber with a vegetable peeler (or use a grater if you're feeling lazy). Add all vegetables, herbs, and sesame seeds to a large salad bowl with noodles, and mix together.

3. Whisk all dressing ingredients together in a small bowl. Drizzle over salad ingredients and stir to combine. Serve straightaway or leave in the refrigerator for up to five days.

*The kind of tahini you use is important. The darker, thicker, unhulled kind, while full of extra nutritious goodness and great for many reasons, is much more bitter and less runny. Using the thinner, paler hulled tahini for creamy sauces is better for recipes like this.

Kitchen Note: This salad is great for those who aren't huge vegetable fans. You can substitute peanut butter for the tahini for a satay flavor, or leave the tahini out entirely (along with the water) if you aren't keen. If you don't need all of the dressing, store it in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to five days to use again.

Per serving (made with udon noodles): 426 Calories, 11 g Protein, 0 mg Cholesterol, 53 g Carbohydrates, 7 g Total sugars (2 g Added sugars), 9 g Fiber, 22 g Total fat (3 g sat), 434 mg Sodium, ★★★★★ Vitamin K, ★★★★ Phosphorus, ★★★ Vitamin A, B1 (thiamine), Iron, ★★ Vitamin B2 (riboflavin), B6, C, Calcium, Folate, Magnesium, Zinc, ★ Vitamin B3 (niacin), Potassium

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60 min prep time

serves 4

Salmon Panzanella Salad D N

From ***My Harvest Kitchen*** by Gesine Bullock-Prado ($35, The Countryman Press, 2025)

- 1 lb salmon fillet
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1 lemon, cut into thin slices
- 10 oz stale white crusty bread, cut into 1-inch cubes
- ¼ c plus 2 Tbsp extra-virgin olive oil, divided
- 2 Tbsp red wine vinegar
- 1 small cucumber, gently peeled with some of the green left on
- 1 large heirloom tomato, diced
- 1 medium red onion, thinly sliced
- 2 c baby arugula
- 1 bunch basil, leaves cut or torn into strips
- ¼ tsp baking soda
- 8 oz French green beans, trimmed and cut into ½-inch pieces

1. Preheat oven to 400°. Place a half sheet of parchment paper on a sheet pan and fold in half lengthwise so folded piece measures approximately 9x6 inches. Unfold parchment and place salmon, skin side down, on one side of parchment. Season with salt and pepper and arrange lemon slices on top. Fold other side of parchment over and fold over edges of parchment to seal salmon in.

2. Bake for 20 to 25 minutes. Remove from oven and transfer salmon in its paper to a cooling rack. Line sheet pan with another piece of parchment and spread bread cubes on prepared sheet pan. Brush with 2 tablespoons of the oil and bake for 5 to 7 minutes to slightly crisp bread. Remove from oven and set aside to cool.

3. Whisk together remaining ¼ cup of oil and vinegar, a generous pinch of salt, and a few pinches of pepper in a serving bowl. Cut cucumber into ¼-inch rounds and add to a serving bowl, along with bread, tomato, onion, arugula, and basil.

4. Fill a small bowl halfway with ice. Bring a medium saucepan of water to a boil and add baking soda. Using a slotted spoon, add green beans and cook until barely tender, about 3 minutes (baking soda creates an alkaline environment in the water that will help keep the beans a vibrant green). Transfer green beans to ice bath to stop cooking and cool them down quickly. Drain beans and pat dry with a clean kitchen towel, and then add to salad in serving bowl. Gently toss to coat salad with dressing. Using a fish spatula, carefully arrange salmon on top of salad. Serve immediately.

Kitchen Note: Panzanella is a bread salad. Parchment paper is used for baking the salmon, a method of cooking you can use any time you want to cook fish without much fuss or mess.

Per serving: 611 Calories, 33 g Protein, 62 mg Cholesterol, 43 g Carbohydrates, 8 g Total sugars (0 g Added sugars), 5 g Fiber, 34 g Total fat (6 g sat), 702 mg Sodium, ★★★★★ Vitamin B3 (niacin), B6, B12, D, K, Phosphorus, ★★★★ Vitamin B1 (thiamine), E, ★★★ Vitamin B2 (riboflavin), C, Folate, ★★ Iron, Magnesium, ★ Vitamin A, Calcium, Potassium, Zinc

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 BY *TASTE FOR LIFE* STAFF

guide to melons

Honeydew, cantaloupe, watermelon . . . there are many varieties of melons, and all of them offer a host of health benefits. Melons are mostly water and can help you stay hydrated in warmer weather. They also support immunity, eye health, blood pressure management, and more. Here are a few popular varieties of melon to enjoy this summer.

- ✔ **Cantaloupe** is rich in beta carotene, a type of antioxidant that may help fight cancer. It's also a good source of lutein and zeaxanthin, which support eye health. Cantaloupe adds a touch of sweetness to savory dishes like salads and salsa.
- ✔ **Honeydew** is high in vitamin C and fiber and supports bone and skin health. Honeydew is perfect for blending into smoothies or adding to plain water for a burst of flavor.
- ✔ **Watermelon** contains more lycopene than any other fresh fruit or vegetable. Lycopene may help lower the risk of developing heart disease and cancer. Watermelon can help boost hydration during the summer months, especially when sliced and eaten fresh. It can also be grilled or pickled.

SELECTED SOURCES **"4 health benefits of cantaloupe,"** Cleveland Clinic Health Essentials, https://health.ClevelandClinic.org, 4/11/25 • **"Health benefits of honeydew,"** www. WebMD.com, 12/10/24 • **"The wonders of watermelon,"** Mayo Clinic Health System, https://www.MayoClinicHealthSystem.org, 4/24/25

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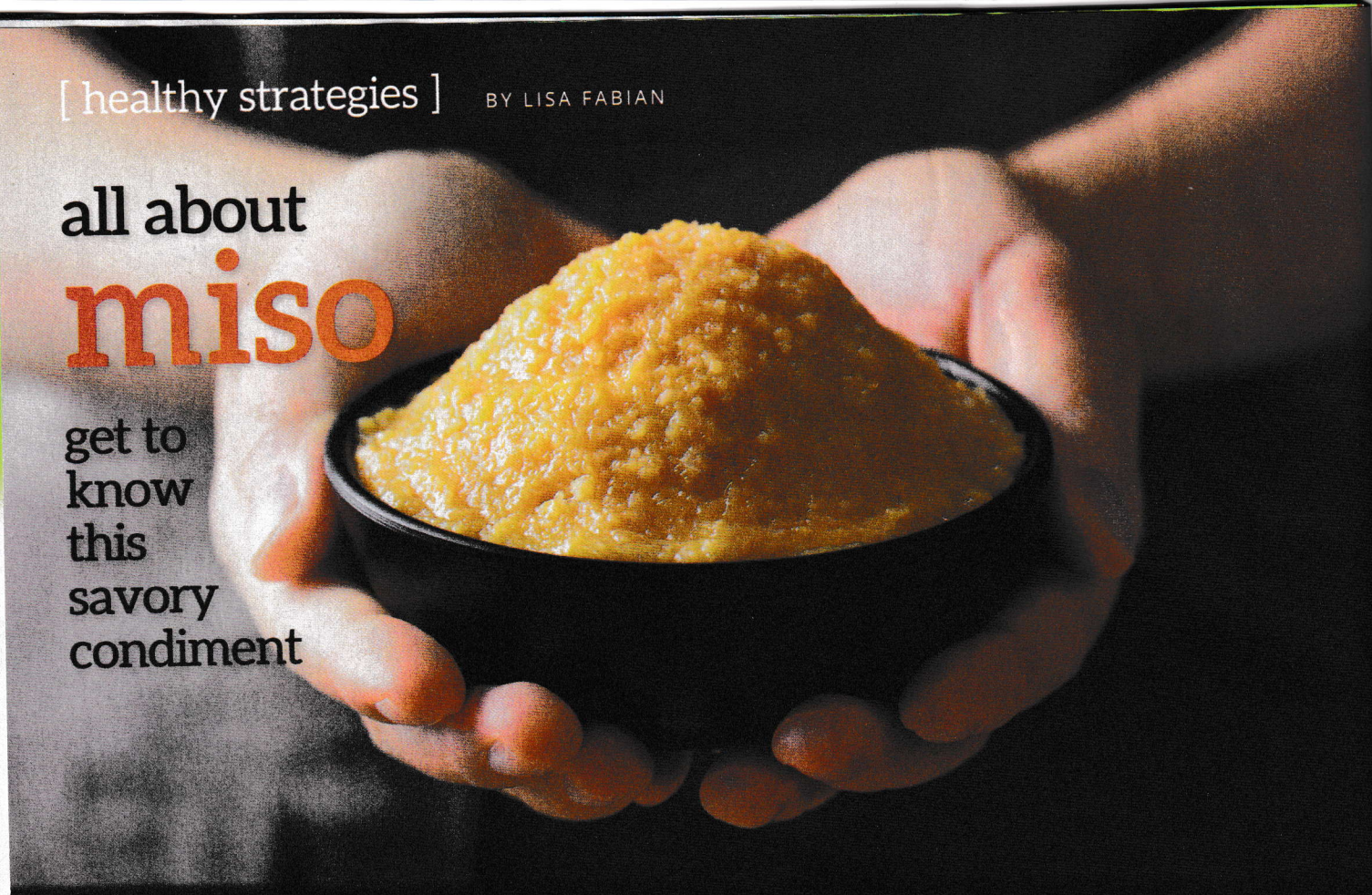
 BY LISA FABIAN

all about miso

get to know this savory condiment



You're probably familiar with sweet, sour, salty, and bitter flavors. But did you know there's a fifth one? It's *umami*, and it adds a savory component to cooking, particularly Asian cuisine.

How can you add this unique flavor to food? One of the easiest and healthiest ways is with miso.

What is miso?

Typically made from a fermented combination of soybeans in a base of salt and the starter culture koji (typically derived from rice), miso can be added anywhere a salty, savory, and satisfying flavor is desired. With its thick, paste-like consistency similar to peanut butter, miso can be easily mixed into many dishes.

The many types of miso

Brands offer their own flavor profiles due to the amounts of soybeans, salt, and other ingredients used. Here's a basic breakdown of what you may find when shopping for miso.

- **Red miso:** With its long fermentation time, this variety is darker in color. Hues range from red to brown. Red miso is stronger in flavor and tastes saltier than other varieties.
- **White miso:** A traditional choice, this is generally the least salty type of miso. A shorter fermentation time creates a mellow, mild, and sweet flavor.
- **Yellow miso:** Stronger in flavor than white miso, the yellow variety is still mild tasting with earthy undertones. Yellow miso is a commonly purchased type.
- **Chickpea miso:** While not a traditional offering, chickpea miso is a good choice if you wish to avoid soy. It tastes similar to white miso.

How to use miso in your favorite dishes

Many know pungent miso for its starring role in miso soup, but it can be used for so much more. Miso adds depth to roasted vegetables, broths and soups, noodles (ramen, soba, etc.), sauces and spreads, glazes, marinades, dressings, grain bowls, Asian dishes, and vegan cheese.

Use lighter miso varieties for sauces, spreads, and soups. Misos that are darker in color work better in grilled foods, noodles dishes, veggie burgers, and stir-fries. Since miso is a salty ingredient, recipes typically call for small amounts of it such as a few tablespoons.

SELECTED SOURCES **"Miso: a traditional nutritious & health-endorsing fermented product"** by F. Saeed et al., *Food Science and Nutrition*, 12/22 • **"Naturopathic kitchen: Miso,"** Association of Accredited Naturopathic Medical Colleges, www.aanmc.org, 11/30/22 • **"Review of the health benefits of habitual consumption of miso soup"** by K. Ito, *Environmental Health and Preventive Medicine*, 8/31/20

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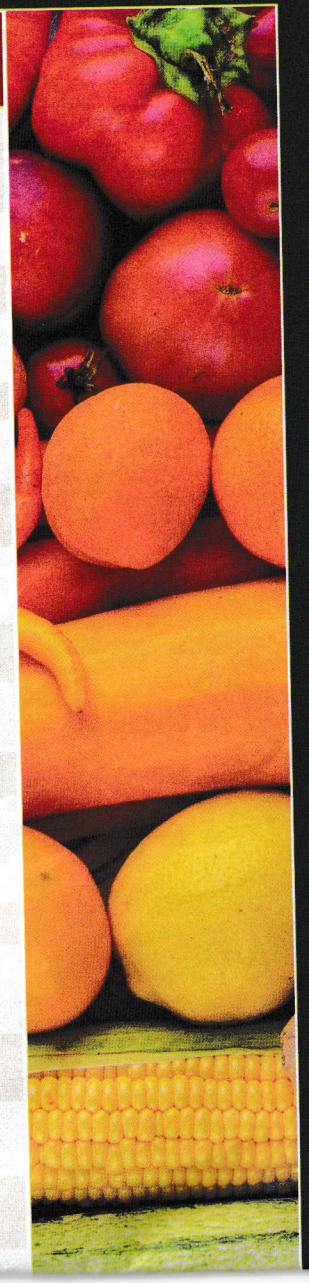
	ASTAXANTHIN	Fights cancer and free radicals.	Salmon, lobster, shrimp.	Not established
	BETA CAROTENE	Aids in cancer prevention.	Green, yellow, and orange fruits/vegetables.	6-15 milligrams (mg)
	LUTEIN	Protects against eye disorders, particularly macular degeneration.	Green fruits/vegetables, especially leafy greens.	Not established
	LYCOPENE	May reduce risk of cancer, heart disease, and more.	Tomatoes cooked in oil, watermelon.	Not established
	ZEAXANTHIN	Antioxidant necessary for eye health.	Yellow corn, mangoes, oranges, green, leafy vegetables, egg yolks.	Not established
	D	Critical for bone and tooth health; may help prevent autoimmune diseases and some cancers.	Cod liver oil, fatty fish, egg yolks, fortified dairy.	15 micrograms; 20 micrograms for ages 71 and older
	E (d-alpha tocopherol and vitamin E succinate)	Antioxidant that helps protect against Alzheimer's disease, cancer, and heart disease.	Wheat germ, almonds and other nuts, cold-pressed vegetable oils.	15 milligrams
	K	Helps with blood clotting, bone formation, and bone repair.	Leafy green vegetables, green tea, alfalfa sprouts.	90 micrograms for women; 120 micrograms for men
WATER-SOLUBLE VITAMINS	B1 (thiamine)	Enhances brain function and energy.	Brown rice, dairy, egg yolks, legumes, soy.	1.1 mg for women; 1.2 mg for men
	B2 (riboflavin)	Essential for energy and immune support.	Cheese, eggs, fish, poultry, spinach, yogurt.	1.1 mg for women; 1.3 mg for men
	B3 (niacin)	Aids healthy circulation and nerves; lowers cholesterol. Because of possible side effects, niacin supplements should be used with a physician's oversight.	Brewer's yeast, broccoli, carrots, fish, nuts, wheat germ.	14 mg for women; 16 mg for men
	B5 (pantothenic acid)	Fights stress; enhances metabolism and stamina.	Whole wheat, eggs, legumes, peas.	5 mg
	B6 (pyridoxine)	Needed for growth and maintenance; helps form red blood cells; reduces high levels of homocysteine.	Bananas, brewer's yeast, brown rice, carrots, chicken, eggs, fish, oatmeal, whole-grain cereals.	1.3 mg; 1.5 mg for women 51 and older; 1.7 mg for men 51 and older
	B9 FOLIC ACID OR FOLATE	Important in genetic, metabolic, and nervous system health; reduces risk of some birth defects.	Leafy greens, liver, asparagus, brewer's yeast.	400 micrograms; 600 micrograms during pregnancy
	B12 (cobalamin)	Needed for blood formation and nervous system health.	Kidneys, liver, clams, crab, fish, eggs, dairy.	2.4 micrograms
	BIOTIN	Promotes healthy hair, nails, and skin.	Brewer's yeast, dairy, fish, meat, rice bran, sunflower seeds, sweet potatoes.	30 micrograms



CHOLINE Not strictly water soluble.	Helps transmission of nerve impulses; supports brain function and fat metabolism.	Egg yolks, legumes, meat, whole grains.	425 mg for women; 550 mg for men
C (ascorbic acid)	Antioxidant for immune, eye, and skin health.	Berries, citrus fruits, broccoli, red peppers, leafy greens.	75 mg for women; 90 mg for men
IMPORTANT MINERALS (Remain in the body.)			
BORON	A micronutrient, may be helpful for bone building, cellular energy, and enzyme function.	Apples, carrots, leafy greens, raw nuts, whole grains.	Not established
CALCIUM	Essential for strong bones and teeth and healthy gums; balance with magnesium.	Dairy foods (and fortified substitutes), dark leafy greens, sardines.	1,000 mg; 1,200 mg for women age 51 and older; 1,200 mg for men 71 and older
CHROMIUM	Helps glucose metabolism; enhances energy.	Brewer's yeast, brown rice, meat, whole grains.	20 to 25 micrograms for women; 30 to 35 micrograms for men
COPPER	Helps build blood cells and collagen.	Meat, nuts, seafood, soybeans, whole grains, dark chocolate.	900 micrograms
IODINE	Contributes to the making of thyroid hormones. Helps bone and brain development during pregnancy and infancy.	Cod, tuna, seaweed, shrimp, milk, yogurt, cheese, iodized salt.	150 micrograms
IRON	Essential to blood cell production, growth, immune health, and energy.	Eggs, fish, liver, meat, leafy greens, whole grains.	18 mg for women (8 mg after age 50); 8 mg for men
MAGNESIUM	Balances calcium; needed for bone and cardiovascular health.	Dairy, fish, leafy greens, meat, molasses, seafood, seeds, soybeans.	310 mg for women 19-30; 320 mg for women 31 and up; 400 mg for men 19-30; 420 mg for men 31 and up
MANGANESE	Needed for carbohydrate metabolism and energy production.	Shellfish, nuts, seeds, sea vegetables, whole grains.	1.8 mg for women; 2.3 mg for men
MOLYBDENUM	Activates enzymes, some of which contribute to metabolizing of toxins.	Legumes, beef liver, cereal grains, dark leafy greens, yogurt.	45 micrograms
POTASSIUM	Protects against high blood pressure.	Fruits, dairy, fish, whole grains.	4.7 grams
SELENIUM	Anticancer antioxidant; works best with vitamin E.	Brazil nuts, brewer's yeast, brown rice, meat, seafood, whole grains.	55 micrograms
SILICON	Needed for formation of collagen for bones and connective tissue.	Green beans, bananas, whole grains, lentils, dark leafy greens.	Not established
ZINC	Important in immune and reproductive health.	Eggs, legumes, shellfish, whole grains.	8 mg for women; 11 mg for men

SELECTED SOURCES **"Dietary Reference Intakes (DRIs): Recommended Dietary Allowances and Adequate Intakes, Vitamins,"** Food and Nutrition Board, Institute of Medicine, National Academies, www.NationalAcademies.org/hmd ■ **"Micronutrient Information Center,"** Linus Pauling Institute, http://lpi.oregonstate.edu ■ **"Nutrient Recommendations,"** National Institutes of Health, http://ods.od.nih.gov ■ **"Vitamins,"** Medline Plus, National Library of Medicine, http://medlineplus.gov

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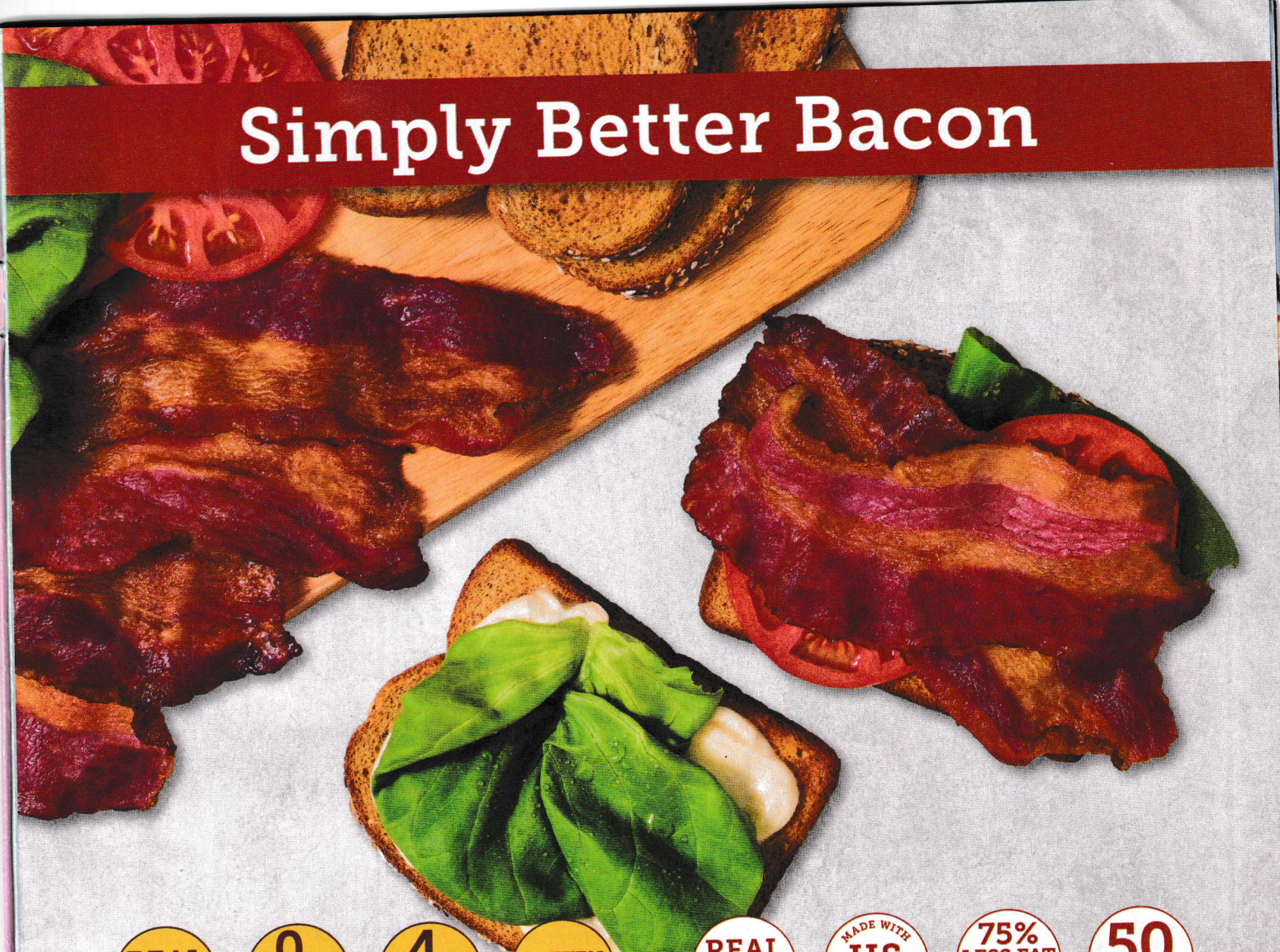

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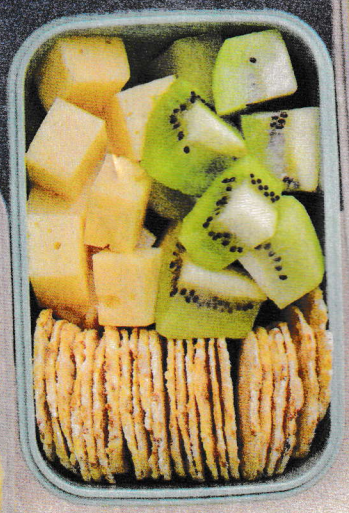
 BY LISA FABIAN

back-to-school lunches

planning is key!



If you have kids returning to school, you know what a stressful time it can be. Throw the near-daily task of making lunches into the mix, and it's enough to make anyone count down the days until next summer.

With a little planning and know-how, packing lunches can be less stressful, and the process can be streamlined for more ease. Here are some strategies for making tasty and packable meals that will be satisfying for all.

✔ Don't wait until the morning to pack lunch for the day. It seems obvious, but minutes spent the night before save you precious time the next morning.

✔ Over the weekend (or whenever you have time to dedicate to the task), plan a shopping list for the food needed for the week's lunches and dinners.

✔ Make staples (dressings, dips, sauces) a few days before. Store in the fridge until needed.

✔ A pot of beans cooked over the weekend can be added to the week's meals (soups, stews, tacos, rice dishes, salads) for a quick and easy protein source.

✔ Stash a supply of pre-made soups and stews in the freezer for last-minute additions to the lunchbox. Freeze in 1-cup portions, so they'll be easier to defrost.

✔ Pre-make grains like quinoa and rice, and then freeze them. These hearty ingredients can be defrosted and tossed with raw or sautéed vegetables and a favorite protein (chicken, hard-boiled eggs, smoked tofu). Add a favorite dressing for a filling lunch.

✔ Chop fresh veggies (carrots, celery, bell peppers, jicama) into strips or slices. Store in a sealed container of water in the fridge (change water regularly) or wrap in a damp cloth and chill in the refrigerator. Pull the vegetables out as needed during the week for healthy lunchbox fillers.

✔ Make batches of cookies or muffins to add to the week's snack rotation. Extras can be frozen for later enjoyment.

✔ When serving make-your-own noodle or rice bowls for dinner, set out all the prepared ingredients so everyone can customize their own. Family members who need a lunch the next day can make their own personalized bowls for a later meal.

✔ Involve your kids in lunch planning. Give them healthy choices and honor their preferences. They'll be more likely to eat what they take to school if it's something they've pre-approved. Keep in mind that a lunchbox is not the ideal place to introduce new foods!

Here's a tasty popcorn recipe that makes a perfect snack for the lunchbox. ●

SOURCE ***Lunchbox*** by Aviva Wittenberg ($25, Appetite, 2022)

© JENNIFER CHONG

15 min
prep time
makes about
5½ cups

Pizza Popcorn GNV

From ***Rebel Girls Cook*** by Rebel Girls Inc. ($28.99, Ten Speed Press, 2024)

- 1 Tbsp vegetable oil
- ¼ c unpopped popcorn kernels
- 2 Tbsp unsalted butter, melted
- 1 tsp tomato paste
- ½ tsp Italian seasoning
- ¼ tsp table salt, plus extra for seasoning
- ¼ c grated Parmesan cheese

1. In a large saucepan, combine oil and 3 popcorn kernels (these are test kernels that will let you know when the oil is at the right temperature to pop the rest!). Place a lid on saucepan but leave it slightly ajar, making a small gap but keeping saucepan mostly covered.

2. Heat saucepan on the stovetop over medium-high heat until oil is hot and test kernels pop, 1 to 3 minutes (listen carefully for them to pop, but stand back a bit from pot in case oil splashes). Turn off stovetop and slide saucepan to a cool burner.

3. Use oven mitts to remove lid. Carefully add remaining popcorn kernels. Cover saucepan with lid completely and let everything sit for 30 seconds.

4. Return saucepan to warm burner over medium heat. Use oven mitts to set lid slightly ajar again (this will let steam escape during cooking but keep popcorn inside pot). Cook until popcorn begins to pop vigorously, 1 to 3 minutes.

5. Continue to cook until popping slows down to about 2 seconds between pops, 1 to 2 minutes longer. Turn off stovetop and slide saucepan to a cool burner.

6. Use oven mitts to carefully remove lid (keep your face away—steam will be hot!). Transfer popcorn to a large bowl.

7. In a small bowl, whisk melted butter, tomato paste, Italian seasoning, and the ¼ teaspoon salt until well combined. Drizzle melted butter mixture over popcorn. Use a rubber spatula to toss popcorn until it's evenly coated. Sprinkle popcorn with cheese and toss again. Taste and season with a little extra salt, if desired. Serve.

Kitchen Note: Think of popcorn like a blank canvas for flavor. You can use the topping ideas in this recipe, or raid your spice cupboard, refrigerator, or pantry for inspiration. If you like things plain, top your popcorn with 2 tablespoons of melted butter and a sprinkle of salt. You can easily double this recipe if you'd like to make a big bowl of popcorn to share. If you don't have Italian seasoning, you can use ¼ teaspoon dried oregano and ¼ teaspoon dried basil (or ½ teaspoon of either one) instead. If you like, try making Dill Pickle Popcorn: instead of the tomato paste and Italian seasoning, whisk 1 teaspoon distilled white vinegar, 1 teaspoon dried dill, and ½ teaspoon garlic powder together with the melted butter and salt. (Do not use the Parmesan cheese when making the Dill Pickle Popcorn.)

Per serving (serves 3): 266 Calories, 7 g Protein, 29 mg Cholesterol, 13 g Carbohydrates, 0 g Total sugars (0 g Added sugars), 2 g Fiber, 21 g Total fat (8 g sat), 162 mg Sodium, ★★ Phosphorus, ★ Vitamin A, E, Calcium

BY *TASTE FOR LIFE* STAFF

gut check the healthful impact of probiotics

The beneficial bacteria in your gut aid digestion and boost the manufacture and absorption of nutrients. You can support these healthful bacteria and make a positive impact on your microbiome by giving it a little TLC: Get fresh air; avoid unnecessary antibiotics, antiseptics, and antimicrobial soaps; supplement your diet with probiotic formulas; and enjoy sauerkraut, live-culture yogurt, miso, kefir, and other fermented foods.

Probiotic supplements are readily available in many forms. Some are formulated specifically for men, women, children, or infants, as well as for those who follow special diets. The Mayo Clinic suggests starting with a supplement that includes a mix of Lactobacillis and Bifidobacterium, as those strains are found in the human gut (along with hundreds of other types of microbes).

The role of prebiotics

Plants—especially high-fiber plants—are the favorite food of your beneficial bacteria. Consider gradually boosting your intake of naturally high-fiber foods like beans, Brussels sprouts, chicory root, Jerusalem artichoke, asparagus, garlic, leeks, and onions.

Probiotic/prebiotic supplements—known as synbiotics—are also easy to find.

Helpful enzymes

For some extra help in the digestion department, consider supplementing with digestive enzymes. Look for single digestive enzyme supplements or combination blends.

To aid in protein digestion, look for plant-based enzymes such as bromelain, which comes from pineapple plants, and papain, from green papayas. These protein-splitting enzymes also can help reduce inflammation.

Pancreatic enzymes help digestion and can also assist in stabilizing blood glucose levels in people with diabetes or hypoglycemia.

SELECTED SOURCES **"Health-promoting components in fermented foods: An up-to-date systematic review"** by Francesca Melini et al., *Nutrients*, 5/19 • **"Probiotics: Supplements for digestive health,"** www.WebMD.com • **"What are probiotics?"** www.MayoClinic.org

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